

BEDFORDSHIRE LACE.

Bedfordshire Point Lace, the *real* "Bedfordshire," dates from the time when Katherine of Aragon lived at Ampthill in Bedfordshire, while the divorce case was going on. Though not actually imprisoned, Katherine was allowed very little liberty, and might never go beyond the castle grounds; she was allowed one woman to wait on her. Katherine was so grateful to this woman for her kindness to her during these lonely, sad three years, that she taught her to make the beautiful pillow lace with which she herself used to pass the time. Katherine appears to have given this woman (whose name, unfortunately, is not recorded), her own lace pillow, bobbins and designs.

The woman, finding the lace both pleasant and profitable to do, taught other women, and founded the first lace school in Bedfordshire. The so-called Buckinghamshire lace is a corruption of the Bedfordshire, which had spread into that country.

The lace is very beautiful, having a fine point ground, with small plaits at regular intervals (like fine "spot-net"), and has generally a rather close "heading" or border, varying in width from half-an-inch to three or four inches, seldom more, as in the very wide lace used for flounces, etc.; the width is almost entirely in the net, it being occasionally as much as 12-15 ins. wide.

Bedfordshire point is rarely seen, except in the form of lace or insertion made by the yard, but it is possible to get handkerchief borders and even d'oyleys, though owing to the great number of bobbins required, they are very difficult to make.

Every different design has its special name; thus you will get the Tortoise, Prince of Wales' Feather, the Trotter (so-called because it has a line of cloth-work down the centre of the design which is supposed to resemble a path, and is called the "trail"), One Eye-Open and the other Shut, the

Butterfly, etc. The old lace women are very jealous over their designs, and will very seldom allow them to be copied. The copying is done by pricking through the holes on to a fresh piece of parchment, but it is very tiring work, and rather trying for the eyes if the pattern is fine.

The requirements for making the lace are the pillow, pillow-stand, bobbins, designs, pins, thread and wheel.

The pillow is generally either square or bolster-shaped, and the making of the pillow is quite an art in itself. Strong, rather fine sacking is used, and is cut to the required shape, then sewn partly up and filled. The filling consists of straw, half-a-dozen straws being taken together and knotted once in the middle. When a few hundred knots have been made each is laid carefully in its appointed place in the pillow, and packed as tightly as possible. When full, the pillow is turned about and hammered with a heavy wooden mallet, till of perfect shape and absolutely smooth and hard. The great art lies in making the knots neither too hard nor too soft. If too hard the pins cannot be easily and quickly pushed in; and if too soft, the pins when in are not firm and steady. My first pillow was a beauty, English made, not German like most of those sold in shops; it was procured for me by an old woman who taught me to make lace, and cost 1s. 6d.

It was a square pillow, and delightful to work on. After that I got a "bolster" costing 2s., which was so hard that the bobbins simply danced on it, and was not properly curved from end to end.

I wonder why it is that the uninitiated always call a lace pillow a "cushion"? Even after they have been told several times, most of them still insist that it *is* a cushion and not a pillow.

The stand is always called a "maid," and for the square pillows consists of half a hoop of wood with a thick slightly curved back, supported on three legs. It has a very bad habit of tipping over forwards when the pillow is up high, but so far there seems to be no remedy. For "bolster" pillows, the stand is straight and can fold up, but it is clumsy.

When the pillow stands are ready, the next thing is to "dress" the pillow. It has generally two coverings of navy

or dark green linenette, pinned on so as to be easily removed for washing. The under cover is for some most unaccountable reason called the "nightdress"! Then comes the "back-cloth," usually a wide strip of quaint printed muslin or cotton, pinned across the back to hold the "drawter" in place. (No one seems to know how the word should be spelt, so I have made a guess of it.) The "drawter" is a strip of fairly thick cotton material, generally white or butcher's blue, the same width as the lace, which is gradually drawn up to cover the finished portions as the pins travel down the parchment.

The parchment should really be put on (fastened by a stout pin through the stuff at each end) before the "drawter" and "back-cloth" are fixed.

Then comes the "worker," a piece of soft thick stuff, generally flannel of some rather dark colour, which is fastened right across the pillow over the parchment, and prevents the bobbins from making too much noise, and also saves the thread from being worn out by rubbing on the rather rough parchment.

A soft three-cornered pincushion across the top, and a bag with two pockets (for full and empty bobbins) fixed to the right and hanging down, completes the "dressing."

The designs are called "parchments" because they are generally pricked on parchment, as it wears for years, and is of a nice quiet colour for working on. The design consists of holes, and inked lines and dots. After a little practice, a good worker can "read" almost any parchment, and tell how many bobbins and what kind of thread will be required, as well as how to work it.

The bobbins, generally, are about four inches long, and are made of ivory, bone, or wood; they are straight and thin, weighted with a ring of quaint old beads, buttons, etc. Only in new bobbins will you find two exactly alike. The old ones are all different in some way, and often very beautifully carved and decorated, sometimes inlaid with bands or dots of pewter, sometimes with bands of silver, sometimes with names or quaint mottoes marked with hollow dots and painted. I have several bobbins with names and mottoes on, as "Kiss me quick," "Love and live happy," "Dear George," and another whose history I should very much like

to trace, bears the inscription in queer, crooked, dotted letters, "William, hung 1858, Worsley."

Many of the beads are old and very beautiful, but unfortunately they are being copied, especially the tiny square rough glass beads, in cheap, bad material, and people are often deceived into thinking they are the real old ones. My old lace woman has a wonderful collection of beads, etc., on her bobbins, and has a history for almost every one. She has been collecting them for about sixty years.

The pins are made of polished brass, and are long with small heads.

For each edge of the lace, the "head-side" and "foot-side," pins with coloured heads are used, the heads being made of sealing wax of six or eight colours. They should be a perfect pear shape and shiny, and, therefore, must be shaped with the fingers, but only by heating the wax and twisting the pin while it is held upside down. The art is very easily acquired.

Special linen thread is used, sold in skeins or "bundles," and numbered "2 slip," "3 slip," etc., according to the number of divisions in a bundle, 2 slip being the coarsest and 15 slip the finest, though neither of these numbers are often used. A silky linen thread called "gimp" is used for edging leaves, etc., and is worked in with the other thread.

The thread is wound on to the bobbins by means of a wooden wheel, as it must not be touched by the fingers. The thread must also be kept from light as much as possible, and it will soon turn yellow.

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[TO BE CONTINUED.]